

Principles of Recovery

(The steps are printed on pages 59 & 60 of the Big Book.)

Step 1. – Surrender. (Capitulation to hopelessness.)

Step 2. – Hope. (Step 2 is the mirror image or opposite of step 1. In step 1 we admit that alcohol is our Higher Power, and that our lives are unmanageable. In step 2, we find a different Higher Power who we hope will bring about a return to sanity in the management of our lives.)

Step 3. – Commitment. (The key word in step 3 is decision.)

Step 4. – Honesty. (An inventory of self.)

Step 5. – Truth. (Candid confession to God and another human being.)

Step 6. – Willingness. (Choosing to abandon defects of character.)

Step 7. – Humility. (Standing naked before God, with nothing to hide, and asking that our flaws—in His eyes—be removed.)

Step 8. – Reflection. (Who have we harmed? Are we ready to amend?)

Step 9. – Amendment. (Making direct amends/restitution/correction, etc.)

Step 10. – Vigilance. (Exercising self-discovery, honesty, abandonment, humility, reflection, and amendment on a momentary, daily, and periodic basis.)

Step 11. – Attunement. (Becoming as one with our Father.)

Step 12. – Service. (Awakening into sober usefulness.)

You may have good reason to believe the above distillation could be improved upon. Do it! The purpose of this activity is to sharpen up our thinking about the nature of AA recovery. Honest inquiry and loving debate are essential to deep learning.

Principles of the TRADITIONS: Perhaps you should take a shot at these if you wish. Let us know what you come up with.

And Down to Business. Now for the fun. We have uncovered 36 instances of the word principle in the Big Book. From these we have discovered 31 principles of AA recovery. You may have noticed that in eight instances we are talking specifically about "spiritual principles".

But the "principles" addressed thus far are but a few of the principles that should guide our lives. For example:

Patience, tolerance, understanding, and love are the watchwords.

Big Book, page 118 line 13

These are the four additional principles we once affectionately called PLUT (Patience, Love, Understanding, and Tolerance).

You are going to have an exciting time identifying AA's principles. It is suggested that you and some friends start with the first printed page in the Big Book, and that you each read a paragraph while the others ask themselves if the paragraph contains any basic action guidelines for

recovery from alcoholism. If so, write them down. You may wish to use the following candidates to get started:

Awakening to Principles

Here in Southern California most AA groups read the first 77 lines of Big Book chapter 5, How It Works, at the beginning of their meetings. While reading the 12 steps one encounters...

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Big Book, page 60, line 3

Some of us have asked, "What are these principles?" Anticipating this to be anything but a trivial question, we searched the book for the word principle. It must be important to the program of recovery because it is used 36 times. Appendix II displays all 36 references.

Definition of Principle. Thus aroused, we have explored. The next thing we did was to investigate the definition of principle in our dictionary. Definitions were extracted from Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, published in 1935. It should be a reliable source for word usage as understood over 50 years ago by the authors of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, which was first published in April, 1939.

The Dictionary Definition of "Principle"

Principle, *n* fr ...Latin *principium* beginning, foundation...

2. A source, or origin; that from which anything proceeds; fundamental substance or energy; primordial; ultimate basis or cause....
4. A fundamental truth; a comprehensive law or doctrine from which others are derived, or on which others are founded; a general truth; an elementary proposition or

fundamental assumption; a maxim; an axiom; a postulate.

5. A settled rule of action; a governing law of conduct; an opinion, attitude or belief which exercises a directing influence on the life and behavior; a rule (usually a right rule) of conduct consistently directing one's actions...

One might distill these definitions of principle down to basic rules of action. However, some of our members are opposed to rules, so we adopted the following short definition:

"a principle is a basic action guideline"

Searching the Big Book on the word "Principle", what are the principles of the AA program of recovery? Five of the 36 uses of the word principle are clearly statements of principles: Numbers 1 through 36 below refer to the order in which the statement appears)

- 22) *The first principle of success is that you should never be angry.*

Big Book, page 111, line 1

Although we alcoholics are not saints, it seems the authors of the Big Book thought that our spouses should be. It is obvious that this principle is avoiding anger.

- 28) *Another principle we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve.*

Big Book, page 125, line 18

This principle is that we respect the privacy of others, especially fellow members of AA.

- 29) *Giving, rather than getting, will become the guiding principle.*

Big Book, page 128, line 2

We practice service of others rather than self-service.

- 35) & 36) *There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against*

all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation.

—HERBERT SPENCER *Big Book*, Appendix II, page 570, lines 16 & 19 (*The principle for us is open mindedness.*)

These are the five easy ones. Another of our 36 examples contains three principles:

25) *Your new courage, good nature and lack of self-consciousness will do wonders for you socially. The same principle applies in dealing with the children. Big Book, page 115, line 20 (Our relationships with others will be vastly improved when we display courage and good nature, just as when we do not display self-consciousness.*

Five additional examples make direct reference to the steps and traditions of AA as being principles:

The STEPS of AA are principles (and a listing of these appears soon):

9) 12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs...*

Big Book, page 60, line 3

10) *No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles.*

Big Book, page 60, line 8

11) *The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.*

Big Book, page 60, line 9

Traditions are Principles:

1 & 2) *As we discovered the principles by which the individual alcoholic could live, so we had to evolve principles by which the AA groups and AA as a whole could survive and function effectively.*

Big Book, page xix, lines 8 & 9

3) *Though none of these principles had the force of rules or laws, they had become so widely*

accepted by 1950 that they were confirmed by our first International Conference held at Cleveland.

Big Book, page xix, line 27

Thus far we may have uncovered 31 of AA's principles. Four were the easy uses of the word principle in examples 22, 28, 29, and 36. Th ree more were found in 25, and there are the 12 steps and 12 traditions, each being a principle.

Use of the Word Principle in the Big Book

36 instances of "principle" in the Big Book.

1 & 2) *As we discovered the principles by which the individual alcoholic could live, so we had to evolve principles by which the AA groups and AA as a whole could survive and function effectively.*

Big Book, page xix, lines 8 & 9

3) *Though none of these principles had the force of rules or laws, they had become so widely accepted by 1950 that they were confirmed by our first International Conference held at Cleveland.*

Big Book, page xix, line 27

4) *The basic principles of the AA program, it appears, hold good for individuals with many different life-styles, just as the program has brought recovery to those of many different nationalities.*

Big Book, Foreword to the Third Edition

5) *My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs.*

Big Book, page 14, line 29

6) *We feel elimination of our drinking is but a beginning. A much more important demonstration of our principles lies before us in our respective homes, occupations and affairs.*

Big Book, page 19, line 7

7) Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems.

Big Book, page 42, line 32

8) That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith which seemed difficult to believe.

Big Book, page 47, line 23

9) 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs...

Big Book, page 60, line 3

10) No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles.

Big Book, page 60, line 8

11) The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Big Book, page 60, line 9

12) We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry.

Big Book, page 64, line 30

13) Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding.

Big Book, page 79, line 6

14) Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles we think we ought not to urge them.

Big Book, page 83, line 13

15) If not members of religious bodies, we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discussing.

Big Book, page 87, line 26

16) The main thing is that he be willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual principles.

Big Book, page 93, line 10

17) When dealing with such a person, you had better use everyday language to describe spiritual principles.

Big Book, page 93, line 12

18) We are dealing only with general principles common to most denominations.

Big Book, page 93, line 12

19) Should they accept and practice spiritual principles, there is a much better chance that the head of the family will recover.

Big Book, page 97, line 29\

When your prospect has made such reparation as he can to his family, and has thoroughly explained to them the new principles by which he is living, he should proceed to put those principles into action at home.

Big Book, page 98, lines 26 & 28

22) The first principle of success is that you should never be angry.

Big Book, page 111, line 1

23) If you act upon these principles, your husband may stop or moderate.

Big Book, page 112, line 20

24) The same principles which apply to husband number one should be practiced.

Big Book, page 112, line 22

25) Your new courage, good nature and lack of self-consciousness will do wonders for you socially. The same principle applies in dealing with the children.

Big Book, page 115, line 20

26) Now we try to put spiritual principles to work in every department of our lives...

Big Book, page 116, line 30

27) Though it is entirely separate from Alcoholics Anonymous, it uses the general principles of the AA program as a guide for husbands, wives, relatives, friends, and others close to alcoholics.

Big Book, page 121, footnote line 3

28) Another principle we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve.

Big Book, page 125, line 18

Big Book, page 128, line 2

30) *Whether the family has spiritual convictions or not, they may do well to examine the principles by which the alcoholic member is trying to live.*

Big Book, page 130, line 21

31) *They can hardly fail to approve these simple principles, though the head of the house still fails somewhat in practicing them.*

Big Book, page 130, line 23

32) *Without much ado, he accepted the principles and procedure that had helped us.*

Big Book, page 139, line 5

33) *The use of spiritual principles in such cases was not so well understood as it is now.*

Big Book, page 156, line 33

34) *Twelve—Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."*

Big Book, Appendix I, page 564, line 32

35) & 36) *"There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance— that principle is contempt prior to investigation."*

—HERBERT SPENCER

Big Book, Appendix II, page 570, lines 16